

# Mothers and Men

By Harold Trowbridge Pulsifer

THE NEW POETRY SERIES



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## The New Poetry Series

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SOME IMAGIST POETS. 1916.

A SONG OF THE GUNS. GILBERT FRANKAU.

MOTHERS AND MEN. HAROLD T. PULSIFER.



MOTHERS AND MEN



# MOTHERS AND MEN

## A Book of Poems

BY

HAROLD TROWBRIDGE PULSIFER



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TO MY MOTHER  
WHO HAS LIVED MORE POETRY THAN  
ANY MAN IS DESTINED TO WRITE





## NOTE

THE following poems included in this collection are reprinted from the *Outlook*: "The Mothers," "In the Mantle of God," "Theodora," "Mother and Son," "Poet and Folk," "In the Open," "Ecstasy," "I would not be a Child again," "The Riderless Horse," "America to Mexico," "The Lusitania," "Clarion."

"To an Unborn Child," and "Woman, I have seen your Face," were first published in the *Poetry Journal*.

"The Conquest of the Air" was awarded the Lloyd McKim Garrison Prize by Harvard College.



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MOTHERS AND MEN

PART I





## THE MOTHERS

### *The Mother*

DAUGHTER of mine, bride of my son,  
Radiant-eyed from the love you have won,  
Little you dreamed of the long sweet years,  
The fledgling hopes and the half-thought fears,  
The spoken joy and the hidden tears;  
Little you dreamed — and less you knew —  
How much of my life I gave to you.

### *The Bride*

Mother of mine, so long unknown,  
You that have called my boy your own,  
What do you know of the love I bring,  
The hope in my heart, the lilt and swing  
Of life new-touched with an angel's wing?  
Mother of mine with the lonely eyes,  
Has my love meant no sacrifice?

### *The Mother*

Daughter of mine, bride of my son,  
Flushed with the hope of your life begun,

## MOTHERS AND MEN

What have you known of vigils kept  
In the desert land where Hagar wept  
When God forgot and the angels slept?  
Whence came the light within your eyes  
That makes your face so mother-wise?

### *The Bride*

Mother of mine, I know your smiles  
Are tear-wet flowers of tender wiles.  
Why is your garden of life less fair?  
The rose of love still lingers there:  
You have no hope I cannot share!  
Mother of mine, who have loved so well,  
Mother-hearts are not born at the marriage bell!

### *The Mothers*

*Sister of mine in motherhood,  
How can we dream the half we know—  
We that have kept and understood  
The lover's law of sun and snow?  
How can our boy, so wistful-eyed,  
Child that he is in mother-land,  
Fathom the depths of love and pride  
That guard his life on either hand?  
Love as old as the ancient hills,  
As new as the youngest flower—*

## THE MOTHERS

*This is the living spring that fills  
His child-heart, hour by hour.  
We that are mothers of one have been  
Mothers of all since time began,  
Only the mothers of life can win  
To the love we share for the child and man.*

## IN THE MANTLE OF GOD

I PRAY to a God with a woman's face.  
    (My mother's face is wondrous fair!)  
The wide world is an altar-place,  
    And love-in-life the only prayer.

I work for a God with a woman's hands.  
    (My mother's hands are cool and strong!)  
I sing for a God who understands  
    The worker's work and the singer's song.

I live for a God with a woman's eyes.  
    (My mother's eyes have made me whole!)  
The very walls of paradise  
    Are compassed in a single soul!

## THEODORA

A SUPPLIANT for peace I came  
As one who, fleeing sword and fire,  
Seeks refuge at the altar flame  
Within a cool cathedral choir.

No bread you gave, nor any wine.  
I only saw you standing there;  
A mortal tranquilly divine;  
An angel breathing earthly air.

I heard no voice, I saw no hand  
In quiet benediction raised.  
I dared not hope to understand  
The faith your very presence praised.

Yet all my terror and my doubt  
Before your spirit's mystery  
Fled:—as the Gadarene rout  
Down plunging to the sudden sea.



## TO AN UNBORN CHILD

SPIRIT, ere thy winged soul  
    Wakens to the holy day  
As the secret leaves unroll  
    At the fragrant call of May,  
Whispered to the silent air, —  
    Let me breathe for thee a prayer.

May thy Mother's heart be thine,  
    Tender and divinely wise,  
And like sacramental wine  
    Fill the chalice of thine eyes.  
Half the peace her presence brings  
    Were a heritage for kings.

May her hands be given thee  
    With her fingers cool and strong.  
May her voice in melody  
    Echo through thy golden song.  
All the glories of the earth  
    Wait the moment of thy birth!

## MOTHER AND SON.

CLEAR, steady eyes; lips unafraid

To question freely, to speak the truth ; —  
Just for a day was the life-march stayed

Ere the heart of my child was the heart of a youth.

Now the change is come, I know not how,

Still the same brave joy in little things,  
The same frank mouth, and placid brow ;  
Yet I feel the rush of unseen wings.

He dreams at play, his face grows still;

Still and deep as the windless sea ;  
I cannot help, though I have the will,  
When he turns unseeing eyes to me.

I hold him close, yet I feel him start

Like a captive bird in kindly hands.  
In the self-same room he dwells apart  
In a world that no love understands.

Even the lovers of life who share

With God and death life's open gate  
But dimly see through pain and prayer  
The souls they serve with hearts elate.

## MOTHERS AND MEN

Once I prayed for a life beyond my own,  
Sanctified by the pain of birth.  
Now that the gift is come, I stand alone  
Where a new soul walks the fragrant earth.

Though a ghost-babe sleeps in my empty arms,  
Close to the breast where its life began,  
I turn from that dream of childish charms  
Glad-eyed to the soul of the man!

## WOMAN, I HAVE SEEN YOUR FACE

WOMAN, I have seen your face  
Since your little child was born,  
And where pain has left its trace  
There is now no hint of scorn.

I had never dreamed you were  
Half so rich in human worth.  
Did God give into your care  
Two souls at a single birth?

## LOVE'S DERELICT

BEREFT of hope she croons a name,  
A name that is a throbbing prayer ;  
A prayer that is a wingéd flame.

The low-voiced chant of her despair,  
Incessant as the moon-drawn tide,  
Beats upward through the empty air.

The very skull where Jesus died  
Must weep from sightless eyes for shame  
That such a love was crucified !



## PART II



## POET AND FOLK

### *The Poet*

I WAS the trumpet that took you to war,  
I was the glamour in clattering mail,  
I was the pennon you fluttered from lances,  
I was your thirst for the death-dealing hail.

### *The Folk*

Yea, we started like a tempest  
When the loud-tongued thunder calls,  
And you watched us storming deathward  
Through red fire-riven walls.  
Rank on rank we rose and perished,  
Host on host we hoped and died.  
Yours the voice that called to battle,  
Ours the hearts you crucified.

### *The Poet*

Low and grass-grown were the windrows  
Where your sleeping legions lay.  
Sunken in a sea of clover,  
There I lingered out the day,

## MOTHERS AND MEN

Till a spray of blossoms tossing  
Beckoned me to point the way.  
Once, I cried, I sang of battle,  
Joy in death and clashing arms, —  
And this rolling sward is answer  
To the sound of my alarms.  
Life is only youth and roses —  
Seek and find them where you may!  
Mark this field of fairy beauty  
Sprung from your forgotten clay!

### *The Folk*

Halting and weary we stumbled on, stumbled on,  
Led by your luring through thicket and thorn.  
Faded, the rose petals fell from our fingers,  
Hope in our hearts was a vision still-born!

### *The Poet*

Up from your valleys I fled to the mountains,  
Fashioned an altar of ice and of snow,  
Worshipped a God as cold as my temple,  
Scorning the battle and beauty below.  
Ever the sunshine that walled me in crystal,  
Ever the star beams that stabbed through the dark,  
Found me a figure of motionless marble  
Carved at devotions, all pallid and stark.

## POET AND FOLK

Voiceless I waited, and wondered, and pondered,  
Lingered alone with the dreams I had lost;  
Lo, when I prayed then, aloud for my people —  
Out of my mouth went a wafer of frost!

### *The Folk*

There in the valley we waited your coming,  
Songless we labored and longed for the light,  
While the warm blood that throbbed in our bodies  
Deadened your prayer tinkling down from the height.

### *The Poet*

Oh, my people, once I stirred you  
Out of sloth to instant flame;  
Then the rose-strewn path I showed you  
Lured you forth to sullen shame.  
When I prayed that you might follow,  
You but watched me from afar;  
By what guidon shall I lead you —  
Sword, or rose, or distant star?

### *The Folk*

You have strength to see the vision,  
You have words that burn like fire;  
We are halt, and blind, and stricken  
With the weight of dumb desire.



## MOTHERS AND MEN

There is little joy in battle  
For the sake of clashing blade ;  
Roses are an empty trophy  
When their warmth and color fade.  
While you scaled the pass to heaven  
You have left us here to die.  
Is there neither joy nor battle  
Near your temple in the sky?  
Bring us down that starlit glory,  
Make us see it like a rose, .  
Warm with more than earthly beauty,  
Pure as are the deathless snows.  
We will storm the path you followed,  
Host on host all unafraid.  
Dare you sound your silver trumpet  
For the long crusade?

## IN THE OPEN

THE sunlit moon,  
The sweet warm light of afternoon,  
The spurting torch of the cardinal flower,  
The wan white rose,  
The winter gale and April shower.  
O, that I had the power  
To fashion these with joyous hand  
In music worlds might understand!

## ECSTASY

I HEARD the wind among the trees,  
The surf along the sea:  
Star-deep, soul-wide,  
The sudden tide  
Swept on and over me.

My hidden dreams, a rushing sea, —  
All glorious they came, —  
A blazing light  
That made the night  
A living thing of flame!

## I WOULD NOT BE A CHILD AGAIN

I WOULD not be a child again  
For all the rainbow's hidden gold;  
Though I saw wondrous visions then,  
My hands were never strong to hold.

Forgetful of the open sky,  
Bravely I dreamed as hour by hour  
I lingered like some butterfly  
The prisoner of a single flower.

With strength to love, but none to save,  
I marked each fragrant petal fall.  
Flower and dream found a wind-borne grave  
With molten sunlight for a pall.

'Then I was left with empty hands  
And loneliness too blank for tears.  
God pity him who understands  
Glad dreams too holy for his years!

## LAW

OF one vast multitude a single star  
Sped like an arrow from the sky,  
And we who watched it from afar  
Flame into nothingness and die—  
Like children smiling in a dream,  
Firm in our trust of earthly things,  
Still called our little laws supreme,  
Nor heard the rush of Hidden Wings.



## THE CHAPEL BELL

On the cornerstone of the Pomfret School Chapel is carved this cross of letters:—

P  
A  
LUXER  
E  
L

“PEACE!”

*(The great bell's monotone  
This solemn invocation sings.)*

“Peace!

The peace of deathless stone  
Here where the cool green ivy clings!”

“Light!

The living sun, O Youth;  
Athwart the marble lectern falls: —

Light!

The heraldry of truth  
Has touched with gold these silent walls!

## MOTHERS AND MEN

“Law!

The flaming sword that hung  
A lightning flash at Eden's gate:—

Law!

The hope Isaiah sung  
Is mine to sing with tongue elate!”

“King!

Thy Name is mine to bear,  
The house and temple of The Lord:—

King!

Hear them now who kneel in prayer  
Guard thou the temper of their sword!”

## THE GOLDEN CALF

I AM the god that serves and rules,  
Men I serve, I master fools.  
In Peter's pence or beggar's toll  
I make or mar the human soul.  
By saint and sinner the path is trod  
That leads to me, the yellow god.  
Whether you call and I obey,  
Or whether you go where I lead the way,  
Be it you or I with the whip and goad,  
We both must travel the selfsame road.



# PART III





## THE CONQUEST OF THE AIR

WITH a thunder-driven heart  
And the shimmer of new wings,  
I, a worm that was, upstart ;  
King of kings!

I have heard the singing stars,  
I have watched the sunset die,  
As I burst the lucent bars  
Of the sky.

Lo, the argosies of Spain,  
As they ploughed the naked brine,  
Found no heaven-girded main  
Like to mine.

Soaring from the clinging sod,  
First and foremost of my race,  
I have met the hosts of God  
Face to face :

Met the tempest and the gale  
Where the white moon-riven cloud

## MOTHERS AND MEN

Wrapt the splendor of my sail  
In a shroud.

Where the ghost of winter fled  
Swift I followed with the snow,  
Like a silver arrow sped  
From a bow.

I have trailed the summer south  
Like a flash of burnished gold,  
When she fled the hungry mouth  
Of the cold.

I have dogged the ranging sun  
Till the world became a scroll;  
All the oceans, one by one,  
Were my goal.

Other wingéd men may come,  
Pierce the heavens, chart the sky,  
Sound an echo to my drum  
Ere they die.

I alone have seen the earth,  
Age-old fetters swept aside,  
In the glory of new birth —  
Deified !

## LINCOLN

THE trump of war, the tread of marching feet,  
The shrill chaotic cries of little men,  
Of those who bid "aspire" and then "retreat,"  
Wind-driven phantoms of an idle pen, —  
All vanish in the vision of a man  
Like some vast mountain, gaunt and somber gray,  
Guarding the heavens that it seems to scan  
For one faint glimmer of returning day, —  
Then first to hear the Morning Spirit call  
Leaps into life, warm sunlight over all!

## THE RIDERLESS HORSE

CLOSE ranks and ride on !  
Though his saddle be bare,  
The bullet is sped,  
Now the dead  
Cannot care.  
Close ranks and ride on !  
Let the pitiless stride  
Of the host that he led,  
Though his saddle be red,  
Sweep on like the tide.  
Close ranks and ride on !  
The banner he bore  
For God and the right  
Never faltered before.  
Quick, up with it, then !  
For the right ! For the light !  
Lest legions of men  
Be lost in the night !

## AMERICA TO MEXICO

(ON THE OCCUPATION OF VERA CRUZ)

WE do not come  
With throbbing drum  
And fifes triumphant crying.  
We know the cost  
And count our lost  
Or ever they lie dying.

We have no lust for battle  
Where men like driven cattle  
Go down before the bullet and the blade.  
No dread and vengeful ghost  
Shall guide our northern host,  
Our legions of the just and unafraid.

Where Cortez marched in slaughter  
Through blood that ran like water  
We sound the knell of passion with our guns.  
No lure of land shall blind us,  
And the pledge with which we bind us  
Is the life and faith and vision of our sons.

## MOTHERS AND MEN

Where the empire of the Frank  
Drave backward rank on rank  
Before the sword of Juarez and the right ;  
There vultures stand at bay,  
Yet the northern eagles say  
That to-morrow shall bring freedom and the light !

Fling wide your gates before us !  
By the love of truth that bore us  
Through the blinding rain of death on Bunker Hill,  
In our veins the blood is singing,  
In our ears the slogan ringing :  
Faith is freedom, right is power — and God's will !



## AMERICA TO AMERICA

(ON THE EVACUATION OF VERA CRUZ)

WE were proud of our dead, for they died  
At the word of command that we gave.  
Now we bury the hope of that pride  
In the earth of their newly-dug grave.

They died for a vision of peace  
With the courage that Bunker Hill knew.  
Let the call for such sacrifice cease  
Till our leaders can dare to be true!

## THE LUSITANIA

(MAY SEVENTH, 1915)

FOR that proud ship we do not weep;—  
From out the womb of future years  
Ten thousand ships will dare the deep,  
Her peers, and more than peers.

We do not weep for those who died,  
Nor question of the sullen sea  
Why in the dark and awful tide  
A thousand needless graves should be.

Yet we are solemn with the dread  
Of those to whom the tocsin comes  
Loud with the story of their dead  
To wake the throb of sleeping drums.

In riven steel and murdered men  
Lies not the measure of our loss;—  
Look, there a nation stabs again  
A bloody Figure on a cross!

## THE LUSITANIA

How shall we guard us from her hand,  
How guard from her the ancient law?  
Her maddened brain heeds no command  
Save that which keeps the brute in awe!

How bar the portals of the past  
And block the gateway to her goal,  
How keep the faith until at last  
We save our honor and her soul?

No riot cry for vengeance blinds  
Our passion for a righteous world;  
With bitter hearts but steady minds  
We stand with battle banners furled.

Not craven heart nor palsied tongue  
Keeps back our fingers from the sword,—  
The courage men have left unsung  
Still waits in service to the Lord.

Yet by the heritage we guard  
More than the cost of present lives  
Shall we be judged who watch and ward  
Within a world where God survives!

## CLARION

(MAY SEVENTH, 1916)

GOD send a prophet tongued with flame  
To sear the Nation's self-content;  
Lest writ in words of livid shame  
Ye read, *eternal banishment*.

Dread banishment from those High Halls  
Your fathers builded wide and deep.  
Once, twice, and thrice the trumpet calls,—  
How long shall ye lie bound in sleep?

The skies are dark with homing ghosts:  
With Belgian blood the world is red:  
Through the salt sea in piteous hosts  
Still troop the phantoms of your dead!

Shrill-voiced your chosen leaders cry  
The need of freedom for your gold.  
Thank God the men at Concord lie  
Too deep to know what ye have sold.

## CLARION

Was it for this the ancient hand  
Carved out the riches of your soil?  
Then let the sea blot out the land,  
The storm blot out the wasted toil!

Blot out the dream of Washington,  
Blot out the vision Lincoln knew,  
Blot out their hope of air and sun,  
Bring back the night they overthrew!

Once, twice, and thrice the trumpet calls,—  
The sword is nigh, the sword is come!  
Awake, O watchmen on the walls,  
And lift your dead hands to the drum!

THE END

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